(b) whether overseas offices of the Tourism Ministry would devise special plans to promote India's tourist trains, Railways is all set to extend the advance booking period for train tickets from 60 days to 90 days as per request from the Tourism Ministry; and

(c) whether Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation would now work in close tandem to jointly promote all tourism trains on the Indian Railways network?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI R. VELU): (a) Yes, Sir. Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), an extended arm of Indian Railways, is closely working with Ministry of Tourism for promoting tourism packages covering major tourist destinations in India.

(b) and (c) IRCTC is also working closely with the overseas offices of Ministry of Tourism for promotion of tourist trains such as Mahaparinirvan Express and such other Luxury Trains, etc. There are no plans to extend the advance booking period for train tickets from 60 days to 90 days.

Low budget hotels in Punjab

610. SHRI VARINDER SINGH BAJWA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Railways have identified sites in Punjab, where low budget hotels are proposed to be constructed either by them or by private parties by taking land on lease;

(b) if so, the details of the sites where Railways would be constructing hotels themselves and those where land would be given on lease with its terms; and

(c) by when work on these projects would commence and by when the hotels would become operational, case-wise?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI R. VELU): (a) to (c) In order to meet the requirement of the passengers, this Ministry has decided to set up one hundred Budget Hotels all over the Indian Railway network. Out of these, 2 locations *viz.* Ludhiana & Amritsar have been identified in the State of Punjab. The exact sites where these Budget Hotels may be located have not been identified. These hotels will be set up on public private partnership by Indian Railway Catering & Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) in the vicinity of the Railway Stations. These hotels will commence after identification of sites, tendering and construction by private operators in all respects.

Extension of facilities to sickle cell patients as thalassemia patients

611. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether he is aware that the Sickle Cell Society of India, Nagpur, during November, 2004 had submitted a memorandum requesting for extension of same facilities to sickle cell patients as thalassemia patients;

(b) if so, whether the requested facilities have been provided during the last three years;

(c) if not, the reasons therefor; and

(d) what are the concessions provided by the Railways to sickle cell patients?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI R. VELU): (a) Sickle Cell Society of India, Nagpur, has been requesting since 2004 for grant of concession to sickel cell patients.

(b) to (d) Due to financial constraints, sickle cell patients are not being granted concession in fares.